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Lafayette couple has a confection to make

By Pippa Fisher



Ellen Reintjes demonstrates the art of truffle making. Photos Pippa Fisher

Lafayette Mayor Don Tatzin and his wife Ellen Reintjes have long been truffle makers. And a few times a year the talented couple share their knowledge and skills with residents by giving a truffle-making class at the library.

There seemed to be a fair amount of tasting going on, too, at the Jan. 24 class held at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. For the adults and a few accompanied children alike who were there, it was obviously a deliciously fun class.

Tatzin and Reintjes have been making truffles at their home for 30 years. It is serious business - they even have a fridge dedicated to it.

They use the name 'Mountaindogs' for their truffles, although there is no actual registered company. The name is a tribute to their dogs, past and present, who have always been named after mountains - Lassen, Sierra, Siskiyou, Tecumseh, Tioga, Tam(alpais), Cloud, and Greylock.

The 90-minute class teaches students techniques and terminology and all participants get to make their own truffles to take home, or at least take home any remaining after tasting. Everyone gets detailed handouts on equipment and where best to buy ingredients locally plus recipes and "how-to" directions. The couple work easily together as they demonstrate techniques and answer questions, clearly used to this being a team effort.

Tatzin says the two have never sold their truffles. "We have donated them for fundraisers," he says, but mostly they make them for friends and family.

Tatzin and Reintjes buy all the ingredients and equipment necessary for the classes, which are free and hugely popular, always having a waitlist.

"Don and Ellen have been generously donating their time and chocolates and handouts for these workshops for two years now, usually around Valentine's Day and then before the holidays," says Senior Community Library Manager Vickie Sciacca.

Sciacca points out that donating the truffle class is not Tatzin's and Reintjes' only involvement with the library.

"Ellen started the highly successful WOW Museum programs for the Friends of the Library in September 2012, which monthly draws 150 people to hear museum docents speak about exciting exhibits and special collections in the great museums around the Bay Area," says Sciacca. She adds, "Ellen was also president of the Friends of the Lafayette Library from July 2015 to June 2017."

Furthermore Tatzin is largely responsible for the Discover and Go library program, which allows patrons to obtain free museum passes with just a library card.

Sciacca explains, "Around 2004 Don returned from a trip to Boston where he learned about a museum pass program available there where patrons could get free museum passes through their local libraries. Don brought this idea to the library administration and after the idea was dormant for several years, it finally came to full fruition about eight years ago and has since become a huge program in west coast libraries started by the Contra Costa County Library in partnership with dozens of museums all over Northern California and beyond."

Tatzin says that he is pleased that the county adopted the program that he outlined years ago. "(They) expanded it beyond my initial thoughts and have made it a great success. My compliments to the county library staff."

How sweet is all of that?



The mayor shares a taste of the truffles.

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